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SUBJECT: Greenpeace "Forest Defender Camp"

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Greenpeace has established a "Forest Defenders Camp" in Sumatra's Riau Province to protect the forest and climate ahead of the COP-13 climate change conference in Bali. The 60-odd camp members, including one American and 11 other foreigners, are

ostensibly investigating forest fires and land clearing, though the endeavor appears more focused on publicity than genuine research. While the group's activities could lead to a confrontation with the authorities, local officials understand that this would be counterproductive and so far have taken no action to remove them. End Summary.

Greenpeace opens "Forest Defenders Camp"

¶2. (SBU) On October 9, Greenpeace announced the opening of a so-called "Forest Defenders Camp" near the village of Kuala Cemaku in the southern part of Sumatra's Riau province. The camp is staffed by 60 volunteers, including one American and eleven other foreigners. According to camp members, Greenpeace established the camp to ensure that forest protection is included in the next phase of the Kyoto protocol and to highlight forest-destruction in the run up to the December COP-13 meetings in Bali. One member of the camp described the group's activities as fighting forest fires, surveying the depth of peat underlying the forest, and assessing biodiversity.

To this end, he said, the organization uses micro-light paragliders coupled with foot patrols to search for forest fires. As of early November, group members concede, no fires had been spotted. Camp members' most prominent activity so far has been hanging English language banners calling for an end to deforestation in areas where plantations are actively clearing land.

¶3. (SBU) Greenpeace's Senior Forest Campaigner for Southeast Asia, Habsoru, said the issues Greenpeace seeks to highlight by establishing the forest defenders' camp include environmental destruction, rule of law and community rights. In this case, Habsoru said the fundamental problem is that plantation companies operating in the area have ignored or harmed local populations and have not adhered to the terms of their land concessions.

Local Officials Criticize Plantation Companies

¶4. Some village officials agree with Greenpeace's assessment. The village chief, for example, told the consulate that people from Kuala Cemaku have been protesting the nearby plantation since it opened in 2004. The situation did not become serious until the following year when the company began clearing the small forest plantations villagers traditionally used to supplement their income. Making matters worse, he said, the company pointedly refused to hire local people to work the plantation but instead brought in families from Java.

¶5. (SBU) Several officials critical of the plantations conceded that the companies appear to have obtained the required land use permits, but believe they were issued without a proper environmental impact study and that the companies have not fully complied with a legal requirement to pay compensation to villagers. The consulate's check

of zoning records indicates that at least part of the plantation area had been officially designated as "protected forest," giving credence to some of the villagers' and Greenpeace's claims. Senior expatriate managers at two other plantation companies acknowledged that problems with licensing, compensation, land zoning, and environmental impact studies like those at Kuala Cemaku are widespread, particularly in South Sumatra and Riau provinces.

Reaction from the Authorities

16. (SBU) In several conversations with Consulate Medan, Hayden Llewellyn, the American at the camp, described Greenpeace's recent activities and run-ins with local authorities. According to Llewellyn, local and provincial police visited the camp on three occasions between October 9 and October 27 requesting information on the foreign volunteers. According to Llewellyn, the local Police asked all foreign nationals to leave the Greenpeace site, but backed down once the volunteers asked the police to put the request in writing.

17. (SBU) Consulate staff discussed the case with the Deputy Director for Police Intelligence in Riau Province, Mr. Dodi, on October 29 in regard to the assertions made by Hayden Llewellyn. Dodi confirmed the police visits, and also noted that Riau Police Chief General Sutjiptadi had visited the camp. Llewellyn described the visit as helpful. According to Dodi, the police's primary concern was that Greenpeace Indonesia had not followed proper procedure and failed to notify the National Police Headquarters in Jakarta that the organization was bringing foreign nationals to work in Riau. There are also issues concerning the use of unlicensed aircraft operating without proper flight clearances and possible trespassing on land belonging to plantations. The police are not acting on those issues for the moment, in part because they realize that a confrontation with the group could have extremely negative PR consequences.

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